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## Two rare Bolivian endemic cacti

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**Fig. 1**  
General view  
of the arid house in the  
David Welch Winter Gardens,  
Duthie Park, Aberdeen.

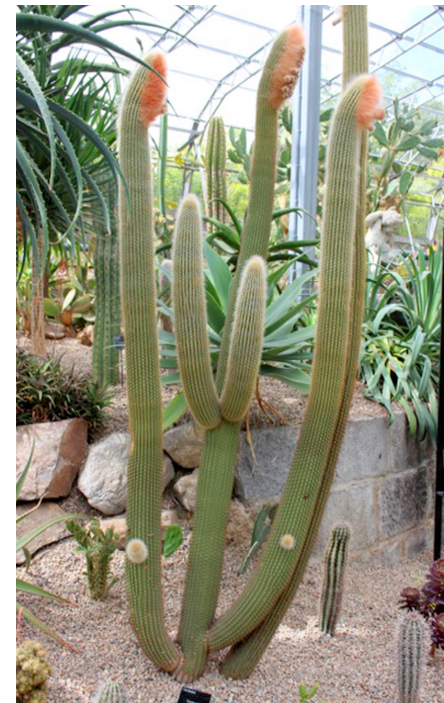


## Two rare Bolivian endemic cacti by Colin C. Walker

In June this year Marjorie and I joined the BCSS Glasgow Branch on an outing to Duthie Park, Aberdeen. This is home to the David Welch Winter Gardens, a very large range of modern greenhouses housing a wide range of plants including succulents. We had been primed in advance as to how impressive this collection is by an excellent online article by Alan Bromley, BCSS Marketing Officer and for those readers wishing to learn more about this collection, I strongly recommend Alan's article and provide a link in the references (Bromley, 2018).

Fig. 1 gives an overall impression of the scale of the arid greenhouse, which houses a large mixed collection of cacti and succulents planted out with not a pot to be seen anywhere. The cacti in the collection are generally large and numerous, but here I showcase just two species, both endemic to Bolivia.

Most interesting for me was a handsome specimen of *Vatricania guentheri* (Fig. 2). This plant was in prime condition and would have been a prize winner on a show bench, not that it would be easily transportable! The plant branches from the base to form slightly tapering stems up to 4m tall. This plant was in flower, the first time I had witnessed such an event. This



**Fig. 2** *Vatricania guentheri*.

cereoid species produces a lateral cephalium, which is a collection of very dense long bristly hairs near the stem tip from which the flowers emerge. Unlike the true terminal cephalium of *Melocactus* the lateral cephalium of *V. guentheri* allows the stem to continue to grow, so in time the cephalium extends down the side of the stem up to 50cm in length. Unfortunately for me this species has nocturnal flowers that are yellowish white and bell-shaped





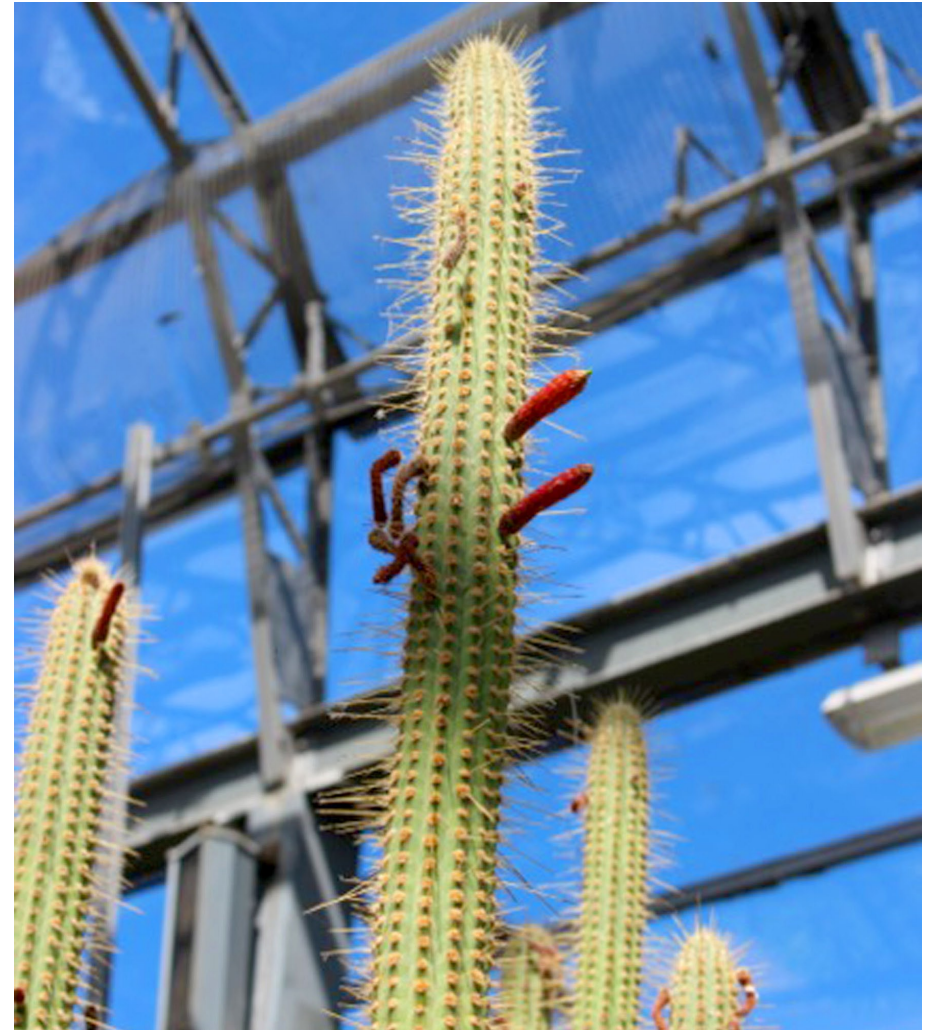
**Fig. 3**  
**Close up of the lateral cephalium and bud of *Vatricania guentheri*.**

up to 8cm long, so I was only able to photograph an unopened bud emerging from the cephalium (Fig. 3).

This species has had a somewhat turbulent taxonomic history and its classification is still in a state of flux. It began life in 1931 as *Cephalocereus guentheri* Kupper, being named after Ernesto Günther. In 1950 the famous German cactologist Curt Backeberg created the monotypic genus *Vatricania* to accommodate this unique species, the generic name commemorating Louis Vatrican, former director of the Jardin Exotique, Monaco. Finally it was lumped into *Espostoa* in 1959

and this is the classification adopted by Hunt *et al.* (2006) in the *New Cactus Lexicon*. This species, being endemic to Bolivia, is disjunct from the rest of *Espostoa* which has a distribution centred in Peru and Ecuador and indeed molecular evidence suggests that *Espostoa* is not the correct placement for this species, so *Vatricania* may be its more appropriate home. However don't change your labels just yet, because a move is afoot to transfer this species to *Cleistocactus*! The wide open bell-shaped flower of *V. guentheri* is very different to the typical *Cleistocactus* flower that hardly opens, so I'm more comfortable labelling this unique cactus as *Vatricania guentheri*.

*Cleistocactus* is a genus that currently has 24 recognised species (Lowry, 2016) of which I grow 16. These are widely distributed throughout South America in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay. *Cleistocactus reae*, the second featured cactus in the Duthie Park collection, is another rare Bolivian endemic that I had also not seen in flower before (Fig. 4). This species was named by Martin Cardenas in 1957 in honour of the Bolivian agronomist Julio Rea. It is assessed by Martin Lowry as a little known micro-endemic species from the Bolivian Yungas, where it grows amongst grass and shrubs on steep slopes at 2,700–3,000m. This plant has slender stems up to 2m tall that branch from the base. The flowers are strawberry red, up to 7cm long and straight, not "S"-shaped as in *Cleistocactus baumannii*, the type of the genus. *C. reae* is now on my "wants list".



**Fig. 4 *Cleistocactus reae*.**

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